Interview with William Attwood

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM ATTWOOD

Interviewed by: Leonard Saccio

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Q: Bill, in view of your extensive—as well as analytic—writings and publications on the subject of our foreign policy, covering some forty years of experience as a reporter, publisher, commentator, participant in the national-political forum as ambassador—with particular reference to your recent book, The Twilight Struggle: Tales of the Cold War 1987, it would seem appropriate to address your comments specifically to our system of determining our foreign policy, and how it is carried out, and by whom. For example, the congress, the executive, the press.

In view of the great disparity of views among George Ball, George Kennan, Senator Fulbright, Senator Church, Senator McCarthy, Senator Jackson, liberals, conservatives, neos of all kinds, and the common opinion of Wild Bill Donovan, Secretary Haig and many others, that we are less secure than we were 50 years ago, what comment would you have as to our system of determining foreign policy?

Before we get into your comments, let me also reference chapter 22, “A Hard Look at the Establishment,” referring to the State Department, of course, of your book, The Reds and the Blacks; and also to chapter 9, “Command,” of your book Making it Through Middle Age, published by Atheneum. The previous book is published by Harper and Row.

ATTWOOD: What's your first question?

Q: What comment do you have, in view of your experience both in the private sector, and as an ambassador working with the State Department?

ATTWOOD: First of all, the incoming President should be someone who knows what he wants—how he wants to conduct foreign policy. Now he may be right or he may be wrong, but he's got to know because that is where the decisions are going to be made. [Working] through the bureaucracy, it can be altered, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. But at least there is a line and people know what that line is.

For example, when Eisenhower came in—although I admired him in many ways—he really didn't have too clear an idea about what he wanted. He didn't know anything about Africa, very little about Asia, knew Europe during the war and knew some people there, but he delegated most of it to John Foster Dulles; who had very definite ideas, many of which were wrong. Such as his ideas about brakemanship, and threatening the Russians when they felt already threatened. And denouncing neutralism; in other words, all those who disagreed with us had to be against us. But in each case you somebody took charge. In Eisenhower's case it was Dulles.

Kennedy knew pretty well what he wanted, too, except he started out as a crusader, you recall from the inauguration speech. Then he stumbled into the Bay of Pigs, because of CIA advice, which he inherited from the previous administration; and that taught him a lesson. By the end of his three years, he had learned a lot about the realities of this world, and that it was not all black and white, and that we had to accommodate to the thoughts of others. He was developing a very new kind of relationship with the Russians, with Khrushchev particularly—with whom he corresponded privately. I think 49 letters went back and forth between them—hand delivered letters.

He became aware of the realities of the world; that the division in the world was more than perhaps north-south, east-west. Yet he had to get over a lot of obstruction from existing agency, from people in the State Department who had a vested interest in the policy—whether or not that policy was the right one. They themselves had invested time in argument and effort, and laid their careers on the line for it, and for policy to change implied they had been wrong. So you're always going to run into that kind of opposition.

Now Reagan came in—another case—knowing what he wanted to do, based on the very little that he knew about the world at large. As you recall, Salvador was probably the number one problem of the first few months of the Reagan administration. And Haig, as Secretary of State, with a very militant approach to the world, was bound to fail because it was alienating our allies. It also was not making any headway with our biggest problem, which was finding a [path] with the Russians that would reduce, or reverse, the arms race before we all went bankrupt. But Reagan, too, came around. And he, in effect—together with Gorbachev—became the architects of the cold war.

But in each case, the President has to—it seems to me—set a direction, and change the direction if necessary. Then the bureaucracy will go along with him. Of course, he can't get too far ahead of public opinion; he'd got to be the kind of President who can persuade public opinion to go along with him. This is why a good politician makes a good President.

If the public goes along with him, then you don't have to worry too much about the congress. The congress has its finger in the wind all the time, and they know what they're hearing back home among their constituents.

Q: Bill, direct yourself to the congress, and how it works in the area of foreign affairs. For instance, Senator Lugar—when he became chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, at the beginning of the Reagan administration—said he was going to have hearings on the proposition that we had made worldwide commitments, and did not have the resources to carry them out.

ATTWOOD: Well, I think they have an important role to play. The most important, I think, is to discourage wrongdoing, and illegal acts, by members of the administration. Well, we've seen this in the Iran-Contra scandal, with Oliver North and those people. They, also, were able to give impetus to our movement towards arms control. There again, they were hearing it from their constituents, that people were getting tired of the arms race; they didn't perceive the Soviets as being the huge threat that they were perceived to be in the '50's.

So congress, by having hearings, and generating the publicity that comes from a public hearing, I think have an influence on public opinion. But public opinion, in our country—indeed, in all democracies and even in the Soviet Union—does have a role to play. And the leadership can get too separated from the public on this issue.

So again I say, the congress—as being a representative of the people—can articulate the views of the public before a larger audience, and get attention in the press. And of course, the press can go too far in what can be a wrong direction.

Nicaragua is a case in point. Reagan is about to go out of office, but he has not gotten Ortega to say 'uncle' yet, as he intended he would—or overthrow him. And a lot of that is due to the fact that the congress just wouldn't vote the funds for the Contras. They sensed their own constituents back home really didn't want us to get involved in another tropical war on behalf of someone who really didn't mean very much. They were never persuaded that Daniel Ortega was a threat—a military threat—to the United States. Half of the American people don't know—according to a Gallop poll—where Central America is. And the others can't conceive of these tiny countries representing a great threat to us.

So American common sense comes into play through the congress, I think.

Well, there's a difference between the academics and the State Department; because most regular Foreign Service officers have been out in the field—have been abroad.

And you really can't understand the world until you live there. As a matter-of-fact, Ernest Hemingway once said that you never learn anything about a country until you have to make your living in it, and then you really know what it's like. At least Foreign Service officers have some mud on their boots, so to speak; and they can draw on that kind of firsthand experience.

When you talk about academics, I would assume you're talking about the professional think-tank occupants: Rand, Hoover, and Brookings. I'm not against them, but they very often talk theory; not all, because some of them have been out and seen the world as it is—and not as it appears in the briefing papers. So I think their role is useful, but should not be listened to exclusively. They never sat up all night in a tropical setting, arguing with a bunch of Africans about things that are not even known to most people over here. They've never seen abject poverty. They've never seen the real problems that motivate people in the world, which are not so much cold war problems as problems of hunger, and poverty, and disease.

This is one thing, I must say, Kennedy was the first to mention—in his inauguration speech. But it has taken us since the '50's to realize that the whole world is not lined up into two opposing camps; one rooting for the Kremlin, and one rooting for us. That's never the way it was. And yet that myth persisted longer than any other one in our diplomatic history.

Q: Well, to take an example of a expert—so-called—both in academia and experience, you could take George Kennan. Why haven't his views—which were quite well articulated, and broadcast—had any effect on carrying out our foreign policy?

ATTWOOD: Well, his views on containment—back in the '40's—I think, had an effect on the administration, and the power then; the Truman administration, Secretary of State Acheson, they took his proposal almost too seriously. The containment then became an end unto itself—the containment of the Soviets. Because we were under the

impression then—there was some evidence, not much, but some evidence that they were expansionists. They were never as expansionist as we perceived them to be. In other words, that a military barrier had to be constructed around them.

Yes, I think it's a good thing that we discouraged them from wanting . . . They were acting mostly out of defensive anxiety. They were always under the impression that we were going to attack them; so they went looking for more and more buffer states. So that policy of containment of George Kennan's was adopted wholeheartedly. Later on, he modified his views to the extent of saying we must get along with the Russians; they're a great power with their own interests; we can't treat them like outlaws forever. Then not so much attention was paid to him, because he was not reflecting the conventional wisdom of the administration then in power.

Q: With reference to your statement about forming foreign policy in a democracy, what would you comment about these last 18 months of the Presidential campaign? It seems quite evident that the candidates were fearful of really discussing, in detail, foreign policy and alternates of choices in policy—as experienced during the eight years of Reagan?

ATTWOOD: Because foreign policy is a subject that can be talked about in clich#s, but not accurately; and politicians like to use familiar clich#s as part of their—what we now call 'sound bites' instead of speeches. I mean, peace through strength is, of course, one of their favorites. Nobody can be against peace, and nobody can be against strength; so these are just good buzz-words. A more accurate slogan would have been strength through peace, I think.

In other words, it's the military buildup—in part—which has made us a debtor nation; and which is creating all kinds of problems for the Soviets. So we're both going bankrupt because of strength. Well, it has kept the peace—one can argue. I don't think it necessarily has, because I don't think either country every really intended to attack the other. There's

no reason. There's nothing the Russians want that we have—or vice versa—that would risk another conflict.

[Tape interrupted and jumbled]

ATTWOOD: . . . you get into anything more complicated. Do you remember the problems that Carter had, with the Panama Canal? There was no logical reason for us to try to hand on to the canal; it would have been sabotaged, and it would have turned Central and Latin America against us. But he had one heck of a time arguing the simplistic clich#s—we built it, we paid for it, it's ours, we're going to keep it. Well, those are the kind of phrases that win in campaigns; anything complicated doesn't.

Now, Adlai Stevenson—in '56—discovered from some scientists that the atmospheric, nuclear tests represented a risk to our health—the health of the whole world.

Well, he brought this up in the campaign. And Emmett Hughes, a friend of mine—who was Eisenhower's chief speech writer—said he couldn't believe it. He said it was insane; he said, of course he's right, but you certainly don't bring up a matter like this in a campaign. It's complicated, it needs scientific proof—against a general, who was supposed to be, and was recognized to be an expert in all of this.

He also called for an end to the draft. Well, these were adopted later on—the nuclear test ban, and the end of the draft. But, you never bring up an issue, in a campaign, that is subject to ridicule or can be put down, or this complicated. Because people don't focus in on issues. They say they want to discuss issues in campaigns; but basically, people just want to hear comforting, reassuring slogans—preferably familiar ones. You know—peace, progress, prosperity, jobs, higher living standards, America will be respected in the world. But if you get involved in anything more complicated than that—as you must in foreign policy—and then you're just kicking away the votes.

I just finished writing a book on modern political campaigning. This is one of the chief conclusions, that you just don't go beyond the clich#s if winning is your object.

Q: In view of these comments, what should the function of the State Department be, in the formation and application of foreign policy?

ATTWOOD: Well, I think the President should rely more on the State Department than he does. The trouble with it—at least when I was there, and from what I've observed since—is it's still infatuated with words.

I'll give you an example. When the President of New Guinea, came to Washington on a State visit, Kennedy wanted a briefing paper about it. So the State Department produced, literally, a foot and a half of material, all about Guinea and its economy, the president of New Guinea's biography. There's no way the President could ever wade through this, or would.

So, I could sense this—since I was an old magazine writer, and knew how to write tight prose—I put it all on one page. I said, here's who he is; what motivates him; these are his problems; this is probably what he's going to ask you; this is our line right now—about seven or eight points that he had to keep in mind as he talked to him. He's a proud man. He got treated badly by the French. He's turning to us, but he's a little shy about it. That sort of thing.

Well, if the State Department could learn to communicate with the President, in a way that he would not feel he was dealing with a fudge factory, they could play a very important role. And the Secretary of State should be the person to advise him. The National Security Advisor, under Kissinger—and Bundy—got more and more power; but it's not fair to the State Department. Because they have access; they're 20 yards down the hall! So their views are going to prevail, and they're not necessarily the correct views. And the State

Department, which has the experience and the information, can't get to him unless it's the Secretary of State.

Kennedy was one of the few President who would sometimes make a phone call to some assistant secretary—or deputy assistant secretary; and say “what's going on, I can't seem to find out.” See, the Secretary of State—under our system now—makes it more difficult than when we were in the State Department. Whenever there's any kind of a crisis, he gets on a plane and he's off and away; he's not in Washington. This reduces the role of the ambassador to that of a greeter at the airport, an innkeeper, and a kind of a guide.

I think it's almost insulting to a man that you select as the President's personal representative to a country—who is steeped in that country, lives it day by day—and then at the slightest crisis nobody pays any attention to him; they send either the Secretary, or the Under-Secretary, or Deputy-Secretary, over there to take care of it. This has been growing more and more in recent years, in the jet-age. Because you can be anywhere in the world in a few hours, plus the much speedier communications.

In the old days, they used to send dispatches by boat. People had time to mull things over, and situations got diffused, you know. But today the State Department can't play as close a role, because the Secretary and the President—I don't think—see each other enough.

Q: Will you, therefore, comment on how the embassy should be staffed, assuming that they should have more of a voice?

ATTWOOD: I think they are overstaffed right now, in many parts of the world, and possibly understaffed in others. I'll give you an example. In Africa—when I was in Kenya—we had a PL 480 program, you know, food aid program, going to five countries there. We had one agricultural attach#, and a secretary. You had to travel around to find out where food was needed, what were their problems—their agricultural, irrigation, fertilizing. There were very

few statistics in those countries. They were just achieving independence, and they couldn't understand their own statistics, many of them.

This one man was on the road nearly all the time—a back breaking assignment. There were millions of dollars involved, in PL 480 food. Now, in Holland—the Netherlands—we had five agricultural attach#s, with a whole suite of offices. There was no agricultural crisis in Holland; nothing we were going to do about it, or needed to do about it. What did they do all day?They'd go out and inspect the fields.

But the tradition in the Foreign Service, going back to the 19th century, is that Europe is where the action is—Europe matters. When I came in—in the '60's—the rest of the world was, you know, unexplored, virtually. Africa was a British and French problem. We still had a neo-colonialist attitude towards these countries. So we didn't staff them; we'd staff them with a few people, but not enough to do that kind of job. Although, the administration sections were always very well staffed, because of the paperwork. Paperwork, as you recall, is one of the suffocating aspects of our State Department bureaucracy.

Let me give you one example. The British have a system, whereby they recall a consul from, say, Thailand to London. They say we want you to be in London on such and such a day, and you can leave anytime you want, and here's your allowance. They have an allowance for every city in the world, to London. Now you can take a first class plane, you can walk, you can hitchhike, but you can't go with the allowance. If you want to travel first class, you pay for it. You just get there, that's all.

Not us! Oh no. We have forms, as you know, you fill out. You depart home at such and such a time, arrive embassy, arrive airport. For every hour you are in the airport you are paid at a different rate than when you are out of the airport. You arrive in Washington. Everything has got to be accounted for. And in those days, the vouchers cost about $50 to make up—just one voucher. One man, that I mentioned in one of these books, was

questioned when he got back. They said he got to National Airport—his mother was traveling with him. He said, “Did you take a cab? Did your mother take the cab?”

So finally he said, “No, I took the cab, and my mother walked and carried the bags!” It just got so ridiculous. But that's just an example of the kind of infatuation with paperwork that I think is more typical of our bureaucracy than those I've come in contact with elsewhere.

Q: Would you remark on the educational experience base of Foreign Service officers? Take the two types: those who come in their middle 20's, and those who come in their 30's or 40's—of which there are very few. Then there are those who come in without going through this whole process—landing a job either as an economic counselor, or even as an ambassador.

ATTWOOD: That's a good question. I think the problem with attracting people into the Foreign Service, and starting in the FS-08—or whatever the lowest level is now—and inching your way up—knowing that there are a limited number of top jobs. I mean, there are 140 ambassadorships, let's say; and you know that about 40 percent of them are going to be filled with political appointees, so you are never really going to get to the top.

Meanwhile, you have to go through constant—every two, three, four years—constant changes of location. I think when a man reaches the age of 40, say, and he has executive ability, if it's recognized in private industry he'll be given an opportunity to exercise it. This is not as true in the State Department, where you just have to wait your turn. If a man doesn't have a chance to be an executive, when he's ready, then it's bleached out of him. Then he get's to be 50, get's his executive job, and then he now longer has the energy or the drive to really run a place.

So I think the worst thing about the Department is, it doesn't reward—it hesitates to jump a good man over. If you recognize talent, you should be able to move him up through

the ranks faster than they do. Now everybody is an FS-04, and they all wait around to be FS-03, and everybody sort of moves forward in these [lateral] ranks.

Then you get to be an FS-01, and that is a big jump—to career minister—so you get an accumulation—or you did in my day—of talented, but not extraordinarily talented people. Maybe they didn't have the right connections. Maybe they had one bad mark on their service record. So they're stuck there at FS-01.

I remember we had a rule, back when I was with them, where if you were not promoted within ten years, you were selected out of the Service. In other words, you were fired. Well, I had a friend who was so good he got to be an ambassador—or career minister—at age 40; but in those days you couldn't be promoted to career ambassador until you were 50. So he was about to be selected out because he hadn't been promoted. He was too good! That kind of thing has to be cleaned out. Maybe they have; maybe the State Department has streamlined itself.

But I think they're having a hard time attracting really talented young people—the ones who are willing to stick their necks out, because of this long, slow treadmill that you have to go through before you can really feel that you are making a difference.

You asked what about people who come in at the top—so to speak—political appointees, like myself. Well, I think they're are two kinds of political appointees. There are those who are friends of the President—gave big contributions to the party, and are getting a reward; it's okay if you send them to Luxembourg, I suppose—it can't do any harm. But, it's unfair to the regular Foreign Service officers. So those—I think they can be dispensed with; I don't think ambassadorships should be considered as a reward.

I think if you find somebody on the outside who has qualifications for this type of work—with language qualifications, who has lived in a country, who's demonstrated an interest and knowledge about it, then you have a political appointee. Under Kennedy, a lot of the people who came in were not people who contributed to the party. We were selected, I

think, because we had been around—many of us as journalists. We got to be known as non-career, professionals; because we got so the professional cadre accepted us, since we obviously knew our business, and we didn't try to bypass the State Department and go to the White House—which a lot of them do. We played according to the rules, and we could be very helpful. Because a political appointee can stick his neck out; and the worst thing that can happen to him is he'll be fired, but he has a job to go back to.

Whereas a career Foreign Service officer who would like to stick his neck out, hesitates. If the assistant secretary won't agree with him, he won't be on the next promotion list. So I think an infusion of a few qualified, non-career people at the top can be a very good thing. But not to clutter it up with people . . . I think there was one Johnson appointee, who was sent to Sweden—or a Nixon appointee. And he said, “I actually have to live there?”

Q: Along the same lines, what would you say about the quality and training of the people that you had in your two embassies? Most of them were career people, right?

ATTWOOD: Yes.

Q: What did you think of their background, or experience, or ability?

ATTWOOD: With a few exceptions, I'd say first-rate. I couldn't say enough. The long hours they worked—and for the most part they were underpaid, considering what they do. They could have made more in private industry. Very dedicated. As they grew older, they became a little sclerotic. McCarthyism hurt a lot of them in the 50's—scared them. A lot of them sort of ran scared, and didn't dare to voice their opinions. But I think we're over that now.

On the whole—the younger ones especially—I found to be dedicated, loyal, you name it; worked long hours, didn't complain. And we were in a hardship post. I very seldom had anybody working with me who I didn't have a lot of respect for.

Q: How about the judgement? You had a division in your book, about those who are rational, and pragmatic—as opposed to those who are emotional, and ideologist.

ATTWOOD: Well, that runs right through.

Q: Among your officers.

ATTWOOD: Again, I think the ambassador has a role to play, because a lot of them will react according to how you feel yourself. I'll give you an example. When I got to Guinea, the established policy—back in the Bureau of African Affairs, or the Bureau of European Affairs—was that Guinea was a French problem. The French had dealt with it. The French had pulled out—ostracized it—and the Soviet block had moved in. Those were the days of the cold war. We were all cold warriors in those days—it was the enemy, and we were there to fight it.

Well, the attitude of the State Department was to not do a thing—they are beyond the pale; the French don't want us to anything; therefore we take our cue from the French. Deputy Secretary Summers said, “Well, why let this place turn into an African Cuba?” That was our attitude, though it actually wouldn't have because they were so inefficient that it would have been a disaster. It would have cost the Russians as much as Castro was costing them.

Anyway, our idea was to see what we could do, and find out if these people are neutralists, and bring them around, give them a little aid, and show them that what we do is more practical than what the Russians do. Never mind what the French think.

Well, that created a problem. The embassy was divided. We had one officer who felt we should just let them go down the spout; but the others gradually got to feel that it was more fun to make an effort, and went along with my views. Then I got the President's backing

on it. And of course, if you've got the President's backing, then you find that the Assistant Secretaries of State go along, too!

But that's the only time I used my access to the White House, in order to try to change a policy. He was in favor of making an effort there; and not just kissing it off. All ambassadors have that privilege—of going to the President. It's not one that you should abuse, but now and then, when everything comes to a dead stop—and you remember what it was like in AID. If the bureaucrats didn't want something to happen, it didn't happen. Months went by—ships weren't loaded, ships weren't available. Well, one call from the White House and all of a sudden everything got moving. So sometimes you really had to do something like that.

But there's where it's an advantage to be a non-career appointee.

[Tape interrupted]

Q: Would you comment on the press, and foreign relations, and foreign policy?

ATTWOOD: I could start out by saying that I think when people are brought into the Foreign Service, from the outside—and I don't say this because I happen to have been a journalist all my life—by and large, people who have been in journalism make better diplomats, certainly, than people, say, who have come out of the law.

One reason is that the journalist is trained to observe; to report accurately on a situation; to win over the confidence of people who maybe don't want to talk; to separate fact from fancy—good journalists; and to get some mud on his boots—to get out in the back country and not just exchange rumors with other diplomats. I've seen this happen time and again. I think one of the best things about Kennedy's impact on the State Department was in the number of people who came out of journalism, and brought into the State Department. It's a long list: Carl Rowen, John Barlowe, Martin, and on. It's not just a few of us; I can't remember them all now. But that's one point.

The second is that your relations with the press are—they will trust you, and report accurately what you say, and hold back information which is maybe not in the national interest, if they feel you are leveling with them. And my own feeling—because I came out of this profession, perhaps—was that I always told them, unless the information was highly classified, just what we were doing, what was going on. And now and then I'd say, “That is for your information, and it would be best if it wasn't published.” And 90 percent—maybe 95—accepted this. Because they knew that if they violated that trust I placed in them, I wouldn't see them again. And I think this is true throughout the government.

The press is not your enemy, as many of them think. (end of tape)

ATTWOOD: As I was saying, my policy—and I think that of most former members of the press who joined the government—was that it was always better to trust them, if you wanted them to write accurately, and not to distort things. If they feel you are withholding information, or lying to them, they'll never forgive you. And there's no reason we should lie. I always assumed that journalists were patriotic Americans—as patriotic as I was. That I was in the government meant that there were things that I knew that they didn't know. I went as far as I could in telling them what we were doing. Now and then I'd say, “We've reached a point where I could tell you more, but it shouldn't be published.”

And they said, “Well, don't worry. If it's off the record, it's off the record.” Now, my policy was to trust people; knowing that if they violated that trust, I wouldn't talk to them again—and they knew this. So I never had any bad experiences with them.

On the contrary, they would be very helpful. It worked both ways. Because they had information; they got around in ways that I didn't, and my embassy officers didn't. And they would share information with me, from time to time. I'm not saying they were acting as CIA agents, or anything like that. On the contrary, I think it was a terrible mistake when the CIA actually tried to recruit journalists—and they succeeded in some cases.

But on the other hand, as an American who observes something, I think he has a duty to tell his government about it; only because the government needs accurate information.

So I found that it worked both ways. A former journalist, obviously, can have a much better rapport with working journalists, than can bureaucrats who are—not trained—but habituated to distrust the trust, and consider them as nosey intruders; they're there to get some kind of a scoop, or an expos#. Well, there are those; in every profession there are bad apples. But on the whole, if you tell somebody the truth, and he knows you are, you can establish a good mutual relationship with trust.

Q: You mentioned the CIA. Could you comment on the advantages and disadvantages of their operations on foreign policy overseas?

ATTWOOD: Well, it depends on what the CIA's mission is in a country. I think they are indispensable in gathering information. They have methods of obtaining information that are not available to regular Foreign Service officers—use of money, of course; and recruiting local nationals to obtain information. I don't consider this all that bad.

But I think when we are in the business of subverting, or trying to overthrow governments, or waging paramilitary operations—that's where the CIA has gone overboard, and should be reigned in; as Kennedy reigned them in after the Bay of Pigs. After that fiasco, which was largely caused by the CIA furnishing the President with false information.

I was in Cuba, in '59, and I met CIA people there who main sources were members of the Havana country club. Obviously, they thought that the people would rise up if there was a landing at Cuba, and overthrow Castro. Well, they didn't get out among the people. So, that kind of operation is very bad, I think. And they should stay out of it. But in terms of analyzing intelligence, gathering it by unorthodox ways . . . .

Let's say, just a hypothetical case: one of our young CIA agents strikes up a friendship with an attractive, young secretary of the Soviet legation or something; and he obtains

information through that relationship. I don't see anything all that wrong about that, personally. Those are games, and tricks, that are played. And if we pass on information—as we did to the Kenyan government, about the identity of the new Soviet Cultural Attach# who was actually a KGB man . . . It was useful to the Kenyan government to know what his real job was, and we were in a position to do that. We also worked very closely with the British equivalent—MI6.

So on the whole, I say that they perform a useful function in countries where it is our policy to support the government. I think where they sometimes run amuck, is if we have a mission in a country whose government we oppose. Then they feel that part of their job is seeking to overthrow it, or do what they can to overthrow it. And that's been true in Central America and other places. So they have to be kept on a much tighter leash than they have been—certainly in the last several administrations; not all of them, but several of them. I don't think their role in Indochina was a very proud one, either.

I wrote an article for “Look,” in '66, called “A Few Kind Words for the CIA.” And Dick Helms, who was then the director, was so amazed that he called me—caught me in the shower of the Hay-Adams Hotel. He said, “No one ever says anything nice about us at all. I just wanted to thank you.”

[Tape interrupted]

ATTWOOD: . . . of nationalism is a much stronger force in the world than any isms like communism, or democracy. When you have a world in which 2/3 of the people are way below what we would call our poverty line, they care very little about ideology, or whether they can go to the ballot box or not. They'd like to have things work better so they can eat; and have clinics and hospitals they can go to; and have jobs and work to do; and many a little plot of land to cultivate. If they have any ideology, at all, it's nationalism; it's a feeling that—we're somebody, we are not just the wretched of the earth.

When I was traveling around the world with Stevenson—in 1953—he took note of this. And he said what people in the world really want is rice, and respect. It's not enough that we satisfy their hunger, but they've got to feel that they're not considered to be nobody. But nationalism, which means having a seat at the U.N., and being able to have their representative stand there in front of the world, even criticize and attack the major powers, does a lot for their self-esteem.

Indochina, is a case in point. We thought, in Vietnam, for many years, that this was a great communist threat; that the Vietnamese were the advance guard of the Chinese master plan to take over Southeast Asia—and the dominoes would go down like duckpins.

Well, in point of fact, the Vietnamese were communists. Ho Chi Minh and his associates believed in Communism, and essentially they were nationalists. In fact, they turned to us in '45. They wanted us to help them against French colonialism; but instead of that, we took the place of the French colonials. And as soon as the war was over—with us—they found themselves fighting the Chinese. They were supposed to be—to our way of thinking—Chinese puppets. Well, of course they weren't! But that betrayed a total lack of knowledge on our part, about that part of the world.

I think this has been true in many areas, where we worried too much about what people said, because they sounded like they were echoing the communist line. And in point of fact, they were just asserting their own identity. And nationalism, today, remains—I think—one of the strongest 'isms,' or ideologies that exists.

Q: Do you think this goes as far back as Frank Murphy in China, and the way he handled our representation, against the advice of the poor State Department guys?

ATTWOOD: You mean dealing with the Chinese communists?

Q: No.

ATTWOOD: Well, there's no question that the Chinese communists were ideologically committed to Marxism. But I've always felt that if a country starts adopting Marxist practices—I don't know why that should frighten us so. Because it doesn't work, basically; it hasn't really worked anywhere—particularly in the country where it was first tried, the Soviet Union. And Gorbachev's problems stem from it. It is a proven failure, and yet we've been obsessed by it, as though it was the wave of the future—because they said it was.

So I think if a country says they are going to be Marxist, like Mozambique—for example—fine; let's not panic about it. Go ahead, try it out, see if it works. Well, it doesn't work. And one thing that people who are in power want, above all else, is to stay in power; just as those who are out of power, want to get in power. This is the real motivation in all these countries.

Whether it be [Samora Machel] in Mozambique, or [Sekou Toure] in Guinea, or the Guineans who threw out [Toure]—what they want is to retain power. And if they can't do anything about the standard of living of their people, they're going to be eliminated. And if Marxism isn't going to provide that, then they'll try something else.

You see this over and over in the world; even the Ethiopians are changing. Mozambicans have, the Angolans are changing. They've decided that Marxism [ideology is] bankrupt. And the Soviets themselves! The Chinese. These are the twin cathedrals of Marxism, and they are now looking for ways to modify without appearing to have rejected 70 years of lip-service to Marxist-Leninism. So there again, I think we've been overly sensitive and overly frightened by these words Marxist, Leninism.

Q: May I approach this from another view? And quote, in effect, what many people in foreign policy have said; that—and I'm using your words from your latest book. "Our core concern must always be the United States national interest, which is not served by meddling in every barroom brawl on earth."

Now President Kennedy said this nine months after his inauguration, in effect, in one of his speeches. If I recall correctly, it was at one of the universities—it wasn't American University.

ATTWOOD: [In] June of '63.

Q: Yes, where he said, in effect, we can't be all over the world.

ATTWOOD: Yes, that was one of the best speeches he made during his entire Presidency. That's the one that Khrushchev was so impressed by; and it led to the limited test-ban treaty.

Q: Oh, so it was really important. Also, you quoted from his American University speech the right to diversity . . .

ATTWOOD: “Make the world safe for diversity.”

Q: Ah yes, that's the one.

ATTWOOD: Not safe for democracy, safe for diversity. That was probably one of the most acutely sensitive phrases he ever . . . This is really representative of why we were more appealing to people when the Russians wanted to impose their system on countries. If we could say we don't care about what government—what form, or economic system you choose; we're a diverse world. You have your cultural, economic, and social traditions that are difference; let's make it safe for diversity. Let's determine to live in peace, and not fight over these things.

Well, that appealed; it had a worldwide, favorable response—unlike Wilson who said, “Let's make the world safe for democracy.” Well, you can't, because most people don't know much about democracy. In a lot of countries democracy simply doesn't work. And the Russians got into trouble when they tried to say they had all the answers, and the answers

were all here in Marx and Lenin. It just wasn't true, of Africa—for one thing. So people resented it.

But diversity—the choice of that word was brilliant.

Q: How do you relate that to, say, President Carter's position of freedom of the individual, human rights, and our relations with other countries—on the basis of their compliance with the general principals?

ATTWOOD: I think that Carter put too much emphasis on it, in the sense that human rights is something we should tell the world—and individual countries we deal with—are important to us as Americans. But to make this the sine qua non—if you don't have human rights, we're not going to have . . . I don't say we have to respond with hostility, but perhaps with indifference.

Indifference is something we don't use enough; indifference can be very affective with obstreperous children, too. They expect you to get mad, and some of these pestiferous small countries, who delight in insulting us . . . I discovered at the UN, why not? Let them go ahead. They're getting off some steam, and then afterwards they feel much better. They'd come up to me sometimes—I got it off my chest, you know. Now let's have a drink together. I hope you don't take it too seriously.

But no, we were inclined, for many years, to take everything that was said there at face value; that they really didn't like us because they made these speeches. I've never run into—never is not quite right—but I've almost never run into any anti-Americanism; and yet there's been a feeling in this country for years, and years, that we are disliked in the world—the novel The Ugly American.

I don't think we're disliked; I think our policy is sometimes deplored by our friends. There are cases where we interfered militarily. But even today—even the Vietnamese, who we bombed to smithereens—they don't dislike us, they are trying to reestablish relations with

us. The one thing that nations and people don't forgive of others are humiliation. You can have wars, and you can make up and be friends—as we found out after World War II, with the Germans and Japanese—but humiliating people is something else.

Q: Could you address yourself to the policy, as well as the effectiveness, of our foreign aid program—on a worldwide basis?

ATTWOOD: I think that the best foreign aid—from my experience—because it's less suspect, is often multinational. But I think that we should have something—we, the United States—ought to have some program going in every country where there is endemic poverty, or where there's a real need and people are suffering. It doesn't have to be a big program.

I think one of the mistakes we made early on came out of the Marshall Plan, which was a good thing. The Marshall Plan, I think, saved Western Europe from what could have been an internal communist takeover; and it was a success. But we adapted that Marshall Plan to other countries, where the economies were not ready for the kind of massive aid that was involved in Europe; where small projects were far more effective.

I would see the Russians coming in with . . . Well, they came in to Guinea and they built a gigantic printing plant, a huge radio terminal, a large hotel, sports stadium, technical high schools, universities—for a country where there simply wasn't any need for this kind of thing. These were grandiose projects. We helped build a dam in Ghana, under Kennedy.

In fact, he talked to me about it once. I said now that we're committed to it, we've got to do it, because welshing on it doesn't look so good. But in retrospect, I think we should have —as we welshed out on the Aswan Dam, in Egypt; which I think was the correct decision, because I've been back to Egypt, and I've visited that dam, and it was a disaster.

These huge projects were demanded by the leaders of these new countries, but it's not what they needed. And this is where I felt we did know best.

In fact, in Kenya once I was interviewed by one of the local papers—"The Daily Nation." The headline was, "U.S. envoy admits strings to aid." I did, I said that. I said, "Sure, there's strings to aid. It's the U.S. taxpayers' money. We're not going to see it dissipated on projects that aren't going to be of any benefit to your economy; on Mercedes Benz for a few of your top people"—they knew who I meant. "Yes, our strings are that anything that we bring into this country be used for the benefit of the whole nation, and benefit of the people." It got attention, and it was true. I think we've got to be very careful. I said, "I can't recommend to the American taxpayer—and I'm one of them . . . we have things to do at home. We're not going to do it here, and see it all line the pockets of corrupt officials."

Well, that's blunt talk, but they don't mind that. I think the small schemes. The ambassadors—we had a fund of $75,000, discretionary fund, which the ambassador could use. He could go to some area of the country where the people had built a school, but they had no roofing. We could provide them with roofing for the school, desks, books for the school. That was worth a lot more—for a few hundred dollars. That $75,000 would leave a good feeling for America all over the country; much more than a huge dam and aluminum smelter.

Q: How about the military side?

ATTWOOD: I don't think the troops in most of these underdeveloped countries are used for very much, other than to keep their own people in line. What do they need? I think aid to the police force is probably a good thing; but military aid, I think, is a waste because we're not out to provoke military confrontations. I think training—if they want training—it's better to have us train them than people who are adversaries.

Fortunately, in Kenya—the British pretty well controlled and supplied the army; but we were, I think, helpful in starting something called The National Youth Course—similar to the CCC, of the days of Roosevelt. Unemployed youths, who were coming into the city and committing crimes, could be drafted. We provided the uniforms, and jeeps, and shovels,

and all that. They could go out and do some practical work—like building roads, and so forth. That's the kind of help! They were in uniform, but they weren't armed.

The image of the average American—of the State Department—is still too much effected by the years in which they were referred to as Cookie Pushers, the Striped Pants. I never wore striped pants since I was married, 37 years ago, and I rented them! I never pushed a cookie across a plate!

Anyway, there's still that feeling that the State Department are elitist, and snobbish. If the only ones you got to know—especially some of the young officers, the ones that I knew who are now senior officers—they'd feel quite differently about it. And they have not been doing a very good job. They have no constituency—the State Department. There's nobody rooting for them up on the Hill. There aren't enough of them to be a constituency.

So they're starved for funds, in many ways. I had $5,000 at my disposal for a year's entertainment. So I could not afford to give a 4th of July party. And nobody could believe it. The French, and the Italian, and the Belgium, and the Russians—everybody had a party; and I couldn't. I'd have my fellow ambassadors in and give them a drink. But we didn't have the money.

The other thing is, when they go up to the Hill, which is where the purse strings are—and you know this is just as true of AID as it is of the State Department—they lacked people who'd go up there and say, “These congressmen and senators are not my enemies, but they basically want to get reelected. If I can give them something so they can go back to their constituents and say they voted for something that's going to help me,” they'll vote. But they'd go up there, and they'd justify this on strategic grounds, and this is not going to sell back in Russell, Kansas. So they get the cold shoulder.

I tried to tell this to President Johnson once, but President Johnson was a very difficult man to talk to. I have a picture, where my mouth is open and his is closed. Bill Morris said,

“It's the first picture I've ever taken of President Johnson where he's listening to anybody, because he always had all the answers.”

I said, “I don't think people are against foreign aid in this country.”

He said, “Oh, yes they are.”

I said, “Wait a minute, Mr. President.” I was leaving the government so I could interrupt him. “They're compassionate people. My wife worked in a hospital in Africa, and they had no incubator. We sent a letter back to our hometown paper, and they raised $3,000 and sent us an incubator. My fathers church, on Long Island, sent us a generator for lights in a hospital, in Kenya. But they want to know where the money's going. It's not true.”

These were always presented on the Hill—these programs—as being long-term, of strategic importance, rather than getting them down to the human level.

I remember Senator Vance Harkey came to West Africa once when I was there. And he had a lot of black constituents in Gary, Indiana. Well, we got him out to this little hospital. We had promised them a generator; they had no lights. And four months had gone by and nothing had arrived, you know, from Washington.

So we got him holding a couple of little African children in his arms, surrounded with all these Africans; and this he could use back in Indiana—this picture. And when he heard about the generator he fired off this press release, saying, “I have stood in this hospital, and seen these young black children delivered by candlelight. It's an outrage. We promised them a generator, and I'm going to see to it they get a generator.” By god, we got it within three weeks.

But you see, his interests coincided with ours.

[Tape interrupted]

ATTWOOD: I think it has to start with the President. To go back to your earlier question about how foreign policy is formulated. He has got to be the great communicator, and he has to lay out these things. Now right now, we have Mr. Gorbachev who does the job himself, really. I mean, his popularity has gone from about 4, to 85, just because he's acting human and he gets out of the car and shakes hands with people.

Q: What I'm getting at, Bill, is even the President himself—as you pointed out, in the incident of President Kennedy not willing (at that particular time) to get out of Vietnam, because there was an election.

ATTWOOD: That's right.

Q: How do we [prevent] that kind of problem, as citizens of this country, where we want to do the right thing in our relations with other countries?

ATTWOOD: I said it started with the President, as a great communicator. But obviously he can't do it all; he's not going to do it all because he's a politician first, and has to think about the next election—which is always much closer than it seems.

But I think there's a chipping away. There are organizations, and groups all over this country—as you know—who are constantly meeting, discussing: councils on foreign relations in every city, league of women voters groups. On the whole question of the arms race—and nuclear arms control—there was quite a seed change in this country. A lot of it was due to individuals, in small communities, getting together and talking these things out.

We here, in this town of 18,000, about eight years ago started this group called The Coalition of the Nuclear Arms Control. It was a coalition because it included members of all parties. We got a membership list of 700 people, in this rather conservative community; and we had an incredible list of speakers here: generals, admirals, diplomats, politicians.

And little by little, this was translated into letters to congressmen. And they began to feel that there was a grassroots desire to slow down and reverse the arms race, in the country.

This was done at the local level, by local people; and it had its effect. I think—on other issues—the reason this Nicaraguan exercise, which was ridiculous to begin with—at least in my judgement—is sort of faded away, simply because no support could be mobilized at the grassroots, for it.

On the other hand—well, we have to get back to the congress. The congress has its finger—the congressmen especially, more than senators—on the pulse back home; because every two years they have to face the voters. When they feel the voters are going to vote on a foreign policy issue, they're not going to get on the wrong side of that issue. So I think, perhaps, we can't wait for somebody else to do this; we've got to educate ourselves. And that means going out into the schools.

[Tape interrupted]

ATTWOOD: This wasn't true in the '50's. People accepted whatever they were told by their government. You know, “Ike knows best.” But now, perversely, one of the ironical things about the loss of confidence in our government—after Watergate particularly—the skepticism about what the government tells us, has turned into kind of a desire, among a lot of people, to find out for themselves; not say, “Well, that's what the State Department just announced.”

We have two groups in Stanford: the Forum on World Affairs, and a new one called the Ambassador's Round Table. I don't know why they call it that, because there are only two ambassadors on it. But they have meetings every week or two, and they have speakers come, and question and answer periods, and discussion. And they're very, very well attended—far better attended than they would have been 20 or 25 years ago. People now

feel that they need to get to the facts; they don't swallow everything they're being told. And I think that's a healthy kind of skepticism that's developed.

An ambassador can still make a difference, if he's willing to express himself forcefully, and isn't too worried about antagonizing people who could harm his career. This means speaking up to the Secretary of State, the President, whatever. Now how many of our chiefs of mission are conditioned to do this, I don't know. In any big company how many vice-presidents are willing to stand up before the board of directors and say a decision is all wrong? It takes a special kind of individual; but when you find these people . . .

Q: That's if they even let the vice-president come to the board meeting.

ATTWOOD: If you could get in there! An ambassador has more power than he thinks; because although you must work through the State Department channel, you are still the President's representative. You still have access to the White House, legitimately, if you want to use it. Of course, it helps to know the President.

I think that's one of the most important things; President's should know the people they appoint as ambassadors. They should make an effort to spend 10 or 15 minutes with them before they leave. This used to be done, though sometimes they did it in bunches. They'd have seven come in, and that's no good. But they should take a little time. After all, this man has the flag on his car. The Secretary of State can come to the country, but he doesn't sit in the place of honor; the ambassador is the alter-ego of the President. So the President should be able to call him by his first name, and at least know the guy and remember his face. When he gets a report back, which may be controversial, it wouldn't be just another faceless bureaucrat.

The other thing is, I think we move people around too much. I think at a terrible hardship post there's reason for it, but otherwise when you win the trust of people it takes about two years before they really begin to understand you. And then you yank them out!

End of interview